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Joseph keeps building the family business

The Business Journal of Milwaukee - by [Pete Millard](#)

There's a black-and-white picture of a smiling grandpa George Bockl looking over Robert Joseph's right shoulder at Joseph's 3rd Ward office.

Bockl, a legendary Milwaukee real estate developer and builder who died in April 2009 at age 98, witnessed his grandson establish himself as a third-generation residential and commercial developer in metropolitan Milwaukee with more than a dozen condominium, apartment and office buildings completed before he turned 35.

"Some kids want to be firemen, but I always wanted to be a builder — or a Formula 1 race-car driver," said Joseph, whose passion outside the office is Formula 1 racing.

Joseph, whose father, Leon Joseph, also developed more than 20 multi-family residential and retail buildings in southeast Wisconsin, cherished the weekly dinners and business chats he shared with his grandfather. The time Robert Joseph spent with his grandfather continues to inspire the young developer, who is now 39.

"Robert's success isn't strictly genetic," said Michael Weiss, president of Fox Point's **General Capital Group**, a mixed-used development company.

Weiss and Robert Joseph have collaborated as partners on several retail and residential developments, including the Hide House project in Milwaukee's Bay View neighborhood. Weiss said his partner is quick to size up a problem and is decisive in handing down a solution.

"Robert obviously picked up knowledge at the dinner table from his father and grandfather, who were wonderful role models," Weiss said.

Joseph Property Development LLC is a Milwaukee-based real estate development firm founded by Robert Joseph in 1994. A life-long Milwaukee resident, Robert Joseph said his experience in land development and building construction has created his unique portfolio of projects and developments.

The firm focuses on two core competencies. The first is the acquisition and adaptive reuse of historic industrial and warehouse buildings in downtown Milwaukee and the city's 3rd Ward. These buildings house apartments, condominiums, boutiques, national retailers, award-winning restaurants and a variety of office users.

The second area of Robert Joseph's business is the multi-unit component of residential subdivisions. The company's current projects include the Twin Bridges Condominiums in Jackson and Fox Lake Condominiums in downtown Waukesha. In addition, the firm has developed hundreds of condominiums throughout southeastern Wisconsin since 1994.

Joseph Property Development employs construction managers and expeditors and a site-services team that self-perform much of the labor and costly aspects of construction projects. Serving as its own general contractor, the company is able to supervise the design, scope of work, material acquisition and on-site labor. This helps ensure greater efficiency and value as well as top-quality workmanship, said Robert Joseph.

"I can tell you how many pounds of nails go into an eight-unit condo building," said Robert Joseph.

More than downtown

Since Robert Joseph redeveloped and owns eight buildings in the 3rd Ward and one in Walker's Point, he is perceived as only a downtown Milwaukee developer and property owner. He actually got his start in the mid-1990s developing a handful of condo buildings with 200 units in Oak Creek, Mount Pleasant and Greenfield. Moreover, Robert Joseph recently completed condo buildings with 186 units in Jackson and Waukesha.

"All I do in the suburbs is condos," he said.

Redeveloping historic buildings in the 3rd Ward is clearly Robert Joseph's calling. He also owns three parking lots in the 3rd Ward that some day may host other mixed-use buildings. Joseph Property Development has an 84-unit apartment building called Jackson Square under construction at the northwest corner of North Jackson and East Menomonee streets.

"When the economy turns around, I'll be ready with new apartments to hit the market," he said.

Blair Williams, founder and president of **WiRED Properties**, a boutique Milwaukee real estate development firm, has worked with



Scott Paulus

Robert Joseph . . .

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Robert Joseph on several projects. Robert Joseph is a member of the **Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design** board of directors, which Williams is working with as a consultant for MIAD to develop a new student residence hall on East Menomonee Street near MIAD's administration and classroom building on East Erie Street.

Williams said Robert Joseph, more so than many of his peers, is able to balance the kind of work he handles. He's able to complete projects that are profitable and engage in deals, such as the adaptive reuse of historic industrial and warehouse buildings, that keep his passion for development alive.

"Few people are able to make money doing things they truly love, but Robert does," said Williams.

As one of the largest property owners in the 3rd Ward, Robert Joseph is active with the 3rd Ward Business Improvement District and has earned the respect of fellow property owners in the neighborhood.

"Robert has an excellent sense of timing with his projects," said Ron San Felippo, a 3rd Ward landlord and chairman of the 3rd Ward BID.

ROBERT JOSEPH

**Principal and founder,
Joseph Property Development LLC**

Age: 39

Family: Wife, Kami, an MPS teacher

Education: Undergraduate degree in real estate from the University of Arizona

Hobbies: Traveling

Community affiliations: Member of board of directors at Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design and the 3rd Ward Business Improvement District

First automobile: A silver 1982 Mazda RX7

Last book read: "The Fountainhead" by Ayn Rand

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